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ABSTRACT

A community services counseling project was provided through a program for assisting unemployed union and non-union workers. At least 25 local unions in Middlesex County, New Jersey, participated in the effort. Thirty unemployed workers were screened and given an intensive training course in personal skills development, the role of the union counselor, labor history, structure and government of labor unions, human relations skills, fact-finding skills, organizational skills, and the social-service agency network. At the end of the training, those who completed the program were assigned to be counselors at 27 unions representing approximately 30,000 members. Their major duties were to listen to the problems of workers, to direct them to the appropriate social agency, and, in some cases, to act as liaisons. Counselors came to be well accepted and were instrumental in the development of community services committees that continued in the plants after the project ended without further funding required. (YLB)

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Community Services Counseling through Labor Unions

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How can the needs of American workers and their families be matched to the social services which are offered by their communities? Or, to put it in more specific and human terms, where can a worker turn whose problems may be overwhelming or even destroying him and his family?

These questions are not as simple as they first appear, even with the diversity of today's social services, and the answers are very difficult indeed. In an attempt to explore at least some of the answers, the Community Services Counseling Through Labor Unions Project was proposed, developed, and implemented by the Labor Education Center of the Rutgers Institute of Management and Labor Relations. The project was funded by the Middlesex County Comprehensive Employment and Training Administration (CETA), and had the active cooperation of the Middlesex County AFL-CIO.

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Approaching community services through unions is not a new idea. It goes as far back as 1942 when the Labor Division of the old War Production Board designed a program for the purpose of helping workers and their families in was impacted communities to meet their health, welfare and recreational needs.

Over the years the problem has not been one of resistance by groups with vested interests who denied the right of the American worker to have access to community services. No, the problem has been one of a plethora of services spawned by a society that grows increasingly complex. The difficulties experienced by workers and their families in dealing with a complicated and demanding environment has increased greatly, especially since World War II, afterwhich there was a massive shift of farm workers to urban areas.

DEVELOPING THE PROJECT

Although the U.S. War Production Board had pioneered with its program back in the Forties, the IMLR project in counseling through labor unions was a unique venture in the field of social services.

Thirty unemployed workers were carefully screened and given an intensive training course, at the end of which they were assigned to twenty-seven unions which represented approximately 30,000 members. Their major duty was to listen to the problems of the workers (union and non-union) and to direct them to the appropriate social agency, and in some cases, to act as liaison when necessary. They were not to act as social workers, psychologists, or psychiatrists.

The goal of the program was to develop a Community Services Counseling capability to be provided to all workers (union and non-union) and their families through at least twenty-five local unions in the county. The ultimate objective of the program was to establish on-going community service counseling capabilities in Middlesex County, New Jersey, through the development of Community Service Committees which

would continue in labor unions after the project's end without further funding being needed.

Method for Developing a Community Service Counseling Capability Through Middlesex County Labor Unions.

1. The steps required to mount the project were:

   A. Presentation of proposal to and approval by the Middlesex AFL-CIO Labor Council

   B. Presentation of proposal to and approval by AFL-CIO and non-AFL-CIO Regional and District Directors at a meeting covened by the AFL-CIO Community Services Department of the county.

   C. Communication by regional and district directors to Middlesex County local unions on merits of project and requesting their cooperation.

   D. Recruitment and screening of Community Service Counselors.

   E. Training of candidates as Community Services Counselors by the Labor Education Center and the AFL-CIO Community Services Department.

   F. Counselors assigned to union halls or offices with continued training as needed.

2. Specific criteria were applied in the recruiting screening and selecting, and the training of Community Services Counselors:

   A. Recruiting and Candidates

      a. The existing CETA recruitment procedures were used with certification by the United States Employment Service; operational and administrative handling by CETA; and final selection of candidates by the project administration.

      b. At the final selection the decision was made as to the number of workers to be serviced by a counselor.

      c. Resumes and interviews revealed such things as demonstrated active participation in union and community affairs and dedication to meeting the needs of the workers.

   B. Screening and Selection

      Seventy-seven unemployed workers who qualify under Title XI special projects rules were referred by the Employment Service and CETA offices to a selection

committee composed of three labor union representatives and one labor educator.

Thirty workers were selected based on the following requirements:

a. Ability and willingness to be trained as a union Community Services Counselor.

b. Ability and willingness to follow directions and supervision at local or district union level under guidance and by-laws of the union.

c. Ability to develop rapport with all types of people at different work and professional levels, with necessary personal flexibility.

d. Ability to write progress reports on his or her activities for the purpose of written supervisory evaluation by the Program Administrator and/or the County Services Department, Middlesex County, AFL-CIO.

e. Demonstrated active participation in union or Community affairs.

It was agreed that the counselors would perform the following duties:

1. Attend night and weekend meetings related to the purpose of this project.

2. Participate in meetings involving representatives of community service agencies.

3. Establish and coordinate Community Services Committees in labor unions under local union supervision, governance, and by-laws.

4. Function essentially as a referral agent who guides troubled workers to the appropriate service after listening sympathetically to the presentation of the problem involved.

Of course, not all selected counselors qualified under all of the above requirements. As the selected process developed, it became increasingly necessary to consider affirmative action as a factor if the thirty project participants were to be representative of the county labor force. The different labor unions identified in the work history of workers selected to be counselors were industrial unions (11), building trade unions (3), public sector unions (3), and (1) service union. The more experience a counselor had had with labor unions, the more successful

he or she was to be.

Training

Proper preparation of the Community Services Counselors to function effectively once placed in the local or district union office was the underpinning of the project. Training objectives were set to prepare the counselors to meet the requirements of their future job tasks, as well as the challenges they would face in an as yet unchartered work relationship in which they were to be paid "staff" coming from outside the immediate union structure. Acceptance by local unions officers and members would be the first step in developing the trust necessary to do the job of handling intimate social services needs of workers, their families, and community residents. Effective, cooperative, confidential and inobstrusive handling of social problems would be proof that the unions had not erred in bringing in the counselors. Moreover, counselors would certainly have to know to what agency or resource to refer workers with problems, and the counselors would have to develop slowly but steadily community services committees in the local unions.

Finally, the role of the counselor had to be clearly delineated at the training sessions as being not that of a social worker who is highly trained, but that of a source of information, a bridge between the worker with a problem and the best source of community help.

Thus, for four continuous weeks at the beginning of the project and every Friday thereafter (where reporting and analysis of the weeks activities were added), the counselors attended classes in:

Personal Skills Development: communication skills; public speaking (a frequently requested class); problem analysis and problem solving; interview and counseling techniques, report writing.

The Role of the Union Counselor: counselor as a teacher; as a monitor of community services; as a communication as a record keeper and person who follows up: as a project evaluator; as a service organizer; as motivator of participation in the community.

Labor History Structure and Government of Labor Unions: industrial, construction, public and service unions.

Human Relations Skills: listening, encouraging, observing; the psychology of prejudice; etc.

Fact-Finding Skills; questionnaires and survey techniques; use of library resources.

Organizational Skills: individual, group, and organizational behavior; skills in developing means and methods of action.

The Social Service Agency Network: the agencies; what they do; their structure, functions and purposes; how referrals work; the background, the goals, the philosophy of union community services.

Instructors for these classes were selected from federal, state, county, and municipal social service agencies; from private agencies; from university graduate schools, and from labor unions leaders in the field of community services.

At the end of the four-week traning period, counselors were assigned to twenty-seven unions (twelve industrial unions; eight building and construction trades unions; two public sector unions; five service unions). Twelve of the counselors were placed with unions they knew well or had been members of when employed. Of the twenty-seven unions, three were not affiliated with the AFL-CIO

and overll membership of the twenty-seven unions was calculated to be approximately 30,000.

Additional Training

Additional specialized and tailored training opportunities such as the classes on alcoholism given by the Rutgers Center of Alcohol Studies; and courses provided by the Women's Program of Rutgers University were added to the training schedule of the project, as were flexible assignments of counselors to union halls and offices and at training facilities elsewhere.

Objectives of Training

It was envisioned that as a result of the training received through this program, Community Services Counselors would be able to:

1. Identify the health and welfare needs, problems, and issues affecting workers and their families.

2. Enter into a helping relationship with workers with problems and by sympathetic referral, encourage troubled workers to take advantage of the available services.

3. Encourage participation by workers on community boards.

4. Function as a "technical assistant" in the development of Community Services Committees based on the above in at least thirty local unions.

The health and welfare needs, problems and issues affecting workers and their families.

The counselors had no problem in identifying troubles of workers and their families. The major types of difficulties were associated with the following social services, health and family conditions listed in descending order of frequency:

1. Food stamps
2. Social Security and Disability
3. Welfare
4. Unemployment
5. Alcohol
6. Retirement
7. Lack of money (destitution)
8. Physical and mental illness
9. Drugs
10. Consumer problems
11. Marital difficulties
12. Child care
13. Police and Courts
14. Blood (transfusions)
15. Natural disasters and fire

These counselors came to be well accepted and valuable assets in the unions where they worked. They were able to forge a solid link between the workers with problems and the institutional resources in the community. They identified needs, provided much needed referral information, and were instrumental in the development of Community Services Committees in the plants.